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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1342/01 1211818
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301818Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7109
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001342

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/29/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ZEBARI ON NEIGHBORS MINISTERIAL, STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for Reasons 1.4(b)
and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. During an April 27 meeting, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari agreed with Ambassador Crocker and S/I Satterfield that Iraq must host the next Neighbors Ministerial and that the GOI must fast track ambassadorial nominees to key neighboring countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in particular. He related that he had been non-committal when, at the recent Kuwait Neighbors Ministerial, Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki asked if the USG was interested in a further trilateral. Zebari described Jordan's Foreign Minister Al-Bashir as "very unhappy" with the bilateral relationship and acknowledged that Iraq had to be more pro-active in managing relations with Jordan. Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi also attended the meeting.
END SUMMARY.

Next Neighbor's Ministerial -- Baghdad Must Host

12. (C) Ambassador Crocker emphasized that the aspirational language in the last paragraph of the Kuwait Communique must be treated as a directive. Zebari favors a single-day format, most likely in October, perhaps at the Rashid Hotel in the International Zone. Ambassador Crocker assessed that early preparation for the Ministerial would also create positive momentum for increased diplomatic presence because countries sending foreign ministers to a conference in Baghdad would no longer be able to rationalize the absence of an embassy.

Saudi Arabia/Kuwait Trip -- Assistance Perhaps -- Embassies
Problematic

13. (C) To Zebari's request for a readout of the Kuwait and Saudi Arabia trip, Ambassador Crocker mentioned that the SAG would not open a Baghdad Embassy "as a first measure" and described King Abdullah's reasoning as "non-linear," bouncing from security to elections preparation issues. What this reveals about Saudi thinking about Iraq (one misconception involves an alleged 3.4 million Iranians studying Arabic to try to pass as Iraqis during upcoming provincial elections) highlights the need for a Saudi presence on the ground. On the upside, the SAG is contemplating debt forgiveness and other types of financial assistance for Iraq. Ambassador Crocker thought Saudi reservations about dealing with NGOs and with the Iraqi government directly could be resolved if assistance were funneled through U.S.-administered programs like the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP). To the Ambassador's comment that Prime Minister Maliki agreed to fast-track in the Council of Ministers ambassadorial appointments to key neighboring countries, Zebari added (as he has repeatedly over past months) that he has candidates in mind and wants to move on the issue as soon as possible.

14. (C) Zebari said during the Neighbors ministerial he

discussed debt forgiveness and compensation issues with Kuwaiti Prime Minister al Sabah, who linked the question to upcoming legislative elections in Kuwait. S/I Satterfield asked if either Zebari or Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi could comment on PM Maliki's April 21 observation to the Secretary that he believed the Kuwaitis were prepared to

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accept a UN proposal that the GOK forego all but Kuwait's USD 4 billion environmental compensation claims or reduce the compensation rate to one percent of oil sales. Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi said that the PM was reflecting a "French idea" proposed in Geneva and nothing more. Abbawi added that the Geneva Compensation Committee talks on these issues, which Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Haj Hamoud leads for the Iraqi side, have gone well so far.

Relations with Jordan Poor

15. (C) Zebari also mentioned that Jordan's Foreign Minister Al-Bashir was "very unhappy" with the GOI on a range of issues, with the GOI's move to impound Saddam Hussein's former yacht serving as a catalyst for other grievances ranging from Iranian influence to anemic trade relations. Zebari acknowledged that Iraq had to be more pro-active in managing its relations with Jordan. Ambassador Crocker pointed out that the refugee issue colored all others and confided that part of the Secretary's recent message to Prime Minister Maliki had been that the problem was seriously damaging Iraq's reputation both regionally and internationally and that the GOI had to do significantly more to alleviate the plight of its refugees. S/I Satterfield added that the tone of the GOI's message (that the refugees were all Ba'athist enemies of the state) particularly offended the Jordanians and suggested that he and Zebari

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develop outreach messages targeted for neighboring countries that S/I Satterfield can use during an upcoming regional trip.

Iran Trilat

16. (C) Zebari alluded to comments critical of Iran made the previous day by National Security Adviser Mowaffaq Rubaie, but noted that the Prime Minister's office had already issued a statement distancing the GOI from the statement. Zebari volunteered that during the Kuwait Ministerial he had also chided Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki about Iran's unhelpful role in Iraq's internal affairs, but did not elaborate on Mottaki's reaction. Zebari said Mottaki asked if the US was still interested in holding trilats. Zebari said he responded non-committally in light of recent multiple postponements and cancellations which he described as embarrassing. Ambassador Crocker thought that was the right approach but stressed the USG wanted to keep the channel open.

SFA/SOFA

17. (C) Ambassador Crocker told Zebari that Prime Minister Maliki and the rest of the Executive Council had agreed to use a two-track negotiating scheme that would produce a single document. Prime Minister Maliki wants the Executive Council deputies (the same group that produced the August 2007 Leaders Declaration -- probably a combination of Humam Hammudi, Barham Saleh, Rosch Shaways, Ali Al Adib, Sadiq Rikabi, Hadi al Amri and Ayad al Sammarai) plus Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Haj Hamoud to handle SFA matters, while Hamoud's working group would focus on SOFA issues. Hamoud's inclusion on both panels will ensure coordination and balance on the GOI side. Zebari said it was important that the principals designate their representatives and start work as soon as possible. Zebari assured the group that Haj Hamoud would take the lead on this and try to kick off

negotiations this week.

Anbar Mustard Gas Container

18. (C) Ambassador Crocker informed Zebari and Abbawi that in Anbar province, MNF-W units had unearthed an 11 by 4 meter container that they think contained mustard gas. Ambassador Crocker said MNF-W was not sure how old the container was, and that it showed signs of decontamination efforts. Ambassador Crocker cautioned that the press might be picking up on the story and that it would be better if the GOI made no pre-emptive statements. Zebari seemed pleased by the news, assessed that there would be other containers, and stressed that the story must be exploited.

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